DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 337 018 FL 019 601

AUTHOR	Violand-Sanchez, Emma; And Others
TITLE	Fostering Home-School Cooperation: Involving Language Minority Families as Partners in Education.
INSTITUTION	National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education, Washington, DC.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	NCBE-6
PUB DATE	91
CONTRACT	289004001
NOTE	27p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Advisory Committees; Bilingualism; Elementary Education; *English (Second Language); Family Programs; *Limited English Speaking; *Minority Group Children; Models; *Outreach Programs; *Parent Participation; *Parent School Relationship; Program Descriptions; Public Schools; School Community Relationship; Second Language Instruction; Staff Role
IDENTIFIERS	*Arlington Public Schools VA

ABSTRACT

Information is presented about parent involvement in general and, specifically, about practical strategies for developing partnerships with language minority parents. A framework is provided for fostering cooperation between home and school, given the special factors that should be considered as non-native English speaking families become more familiar with their new communities. Experiences and approaches of the Arlington, Virginia, Public Schools are described. Factors that affect parental involvement are identified, including: length of U.S. residence, English language proficiency, availability of support groups and bilingual staff, and prior experience. Components of a model program are discussed in terms of (1) a district-level response; and (2) school-based initiatives. For the district level the discussion concerns the following topics: intake center, bilingual staff, long-range management plan, multicultural conference, staff development, staff networking, citizen advisory committees, leadership training for parents, native language resource materials for parents, and parent education projects. School-based initiatives are discussed in terms of: school/community events, bilingual staff, administrative support and leadership, family learning activities, parent education workshops and orientation, bilingual materials for parents, building advisory committees, parent/teacher meetings with interpreters, and special projects for science and math. Activities at Kate Waller Barrett Elementary School in Arlington County, Virginia, are reported. An outline for a parent workshop on reading is appended. Contains six references. (LB)

ED337018

NCBE

6

Fostering Home–School Cooperation: Involving Language Minority Families as Partners in Education

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Violand Emma & others

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education

Program Information Guide Series

Summer 1991

by

[redacted]

Emma Violand-Sánchez

Christine P. Sutton

Herbert W. Ware

FL019601

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education (NCBE) is funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs (OBEMLA) and is operated under Contract No. 289004001 by The George Washington University's Center for the Study of Education and National Development, jointly with the Center for Applied Linguistics. The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department of Education, nor does the mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government. Readers are free to duplicate and use these materials in keeping with accepted publication standards. NCBE requests that proper credit be given in the event of reproduction.

Introduction

Now, as perhaps never before, the need to strengthen the bond of cooperation between home and school is being felt nationwide. Schools face the challenge of preparing an increasingly diverse generation of young people for a society in which literacy is a must, an understanding of technology and its many applications is required, and the ability to solve problems and find answers to questions not yet posed is essential. Families, for their part, must prepare their children for a future in which they can expect to move and change jobs or careers many times. As they become adults, today's youth must be able to make not only the decisions that affect their own lives, but also the critical choices about how this country will conduct its affairs, what roles the United States will assume in the international arena, and how we will survive in a changing world of competing interests and limited resources.

Clearly the challenges of education are ones which neither schools nor families can meet alone; they must support each other. When families and schools cooperate, the children reap the benefits—they learn more, they enjoy school and the learning process, and they experience a consistent sense of commitment and support from the important adults in their lives (Epstein, 1986).

This monograph has been designed to provide useful information about parent involvement in general, and practical strategies for developing partnerships with language minority parents in particular. A framework is presented for fostering cooperation between home and school, given the special factors that should be considered as non-native English speaking families become more familiar with their new communities. The authors would like to share the experiences and approaches of the Arlington (Virginia) Public Schools, at both the district and school levels, and describe the ongoing efforts to develop and nurture cooperative links between schools and the families they serve.

The Importance of Parent Involvement

A growing body of research documents the multiple benefits that occur when parents are actively involved in their children's education. Comer (1984) discusses the emotional support that children need in order to learn, indicating that such an environment of support is optimally created when families and school personnel cooperate. Rich, et al. (1979) point to the improvements in student attendance and behavior and in parent–teacher relations that happen as a result of parental involvement. Bennett (1986) cites the benefits to parents themselves as they gain greater confidence and expertise in helping their children succeed academically. And, as mentioned above, students are the ultimate beneficiaries when their families collaborate closely with the schools (Simich-Dudgeon, 1986).

In this document, the terms "parent involvement" and "family involvement" are used interchangeably in order to give recognition to the fact that students may and often do have a variety of adults who can provide the types of support and interaction described below. For many language minority students, the adults in the household may include members of the extended family who assume an active role in the child's upbringing.

Categories of Involvement

Epstein has been one of the principal researchers on the important topic of parental involvement and its effects on student achievement, parental attitudes, and education practices. In her work (1986), she identified five categories of parent involvement in the education of their children:

1. Providing for children's basic needs

By seeing that children are fed, clothed, have enough sleep, and enjoy a secure, loving environment, parents contribute to the well-being a child needs to focus attention on learning both at home and at school. One school-related example is ensuring that children have necessary school supplies and a place to study at home.

2. Communicating with school staff

All schools seek to communicate with parents in one form or another during the school year. The ability of parents to understand such communication depends on a variety of factors, including their literacy level and their proficiency in the language (usually English) used to send the information home. When schools are able to provide written communications in a language the parents can understand and make available a person at the school with whom they can communicate personally, cooperation between schools and language minority parents is greatly facilitated.

3. Volunteering or providing assistance at their child's school

This kind of involvement was traditionally expected, particularly of mothers. However, in Epstein's study, such involvement rarely includes more than a few parents in any school. More than 70 percent of the parents surveyed had never participated by assisting staff at the school. As more and more parents work outside of the home during the school day, this traditional form of parent involvement has become increasingly less frequent.

4. Supporting and participating in learning activities with their children at home

Epstein looked, in particular, at parental activity which related directly to the children's work in class. Epstein discovered the following:

- More than 85 percent of parents spend at least 15 minutes helping their child at home when asked to do so by the teacher; most said they would spend more time if they were told what to do and how to help.
- Elementary students whose teachers emphasize parent involvement gain more in reading and math achievement than students in other classrooms where the teachers do not emphasize similar involvement; students whose teachers stress parent involvement have more positive attitudes toward school, and more regular homework habits.

5. Participating in governance and advocacy activities

"Governance" and "advocacy" refer to the avenues by which parents and the community can influence decision making in a school system. Epstein distinguishes the two in the following way: governance activities occur under the auspices of the school system, e.g., school-appointed advisory committees; advocacy activities are organized and conducted independent of the school system: one example would be a citizens' group formed to lobby the school board on changes in the curriculum. Each type of participation requires a certain level of understanding of the school's programs and confidence on the part of parents. Each also requires a willingness and commitment on the part of educators to include families in the decision-making process in meaningful ways.

In summary, there appears to be a positive relationship between parent involvement in education and the progress that students make in academics and in their attitudes toward learning. Parent involvement takes many forms and can occur at home, in the school, and in the community. School personnel have an obligation to reach out to all families so that all students may benefit. Because modern communities are increasingly diverse in their social, cultural, and linguistic composition, new flexibility and approaches for reaching out are needed to ensure that no one is excluded.

Changing Demographics

The notion of home–school cooperation cannot remain static while characteristics of the home are changing. Nationally, we are becoming an increasingly heterogeneous society. The 1990 census shows a dramatic increase in the numbers of individuals with linguistic, ethnic, and racial minority backgrounds during the last ten years in every geographic region of the country. More than a third of the nation's population increase since 1980 is a result of immigration. During the past decade, Asian and Pacific Islanders more than doubled (from

3,500,439 to 7,273,662) while the number of Hispanics rose by 53 percent (from 14,608,672 to 22,354,059) (Vobejda, 1991).

An example of this change is Arlington County, Virginia, where our experience is based. The changes in demographics have been dramatic and, in all likelihood, may preview the changes that will occur throughout the United States during the final decade of the century. The Asian population in Arlington peaked in the mid-1980s but showed a net increase of 74.3 percent from 1980 to 1990. The number of Hispanics in the county rose by 160 percent; Hispanic youth now comprise the largest minority group in the Arlington Public Schools. During the last 15 years, the system's student population has evolved from being a predominantly middle class, white, monolingual English-speaking one to a student body with a diverse multicultural, multilingual composition.

At the local level, two other factors—family composition and family economic conditions—have also changed over the last ten years. Today, there are many more single parent families served by the school district. Further, the nature of the family constellation has changed, with more school children residing with extended family members than before. On the economic level, it appears that many parents, especially single parents, are facing severe financial limitations and, increasingly, finding it necessary to have two or three jobs.

Overall, the changes in cultural and linguistic heritage, family structure, and economic conditions witnessed on the local school level are reflective of broader national trends. These changes, in turn, have profound implications regarding a school's expectations for home–school cooperation and will require dynamic innovations by educators to ensure that our rapidly changing school age population receives a rewarding and effective education.

Changing Attitudes about Parent Involvement

Have you ever heard any of the following comments about parent involvement in your school community?

- "Parents should be able to take time during the day to come to school to talk with staff."
- "Decisions about education practices and curriculum should be left to professional educators who know what's best for students."
- "Working and/or single parents don't have time to become involved in their children's education."
- "Non-English speaking parents can't really participate in school activities or in helping their children learn."

In the context of the communities and families served by the public schools today, such comments indicate unrealistic attitudes. Schools

seeking parental participation and input need to recognize parents as the primary educators of their children and be both flexible and innovative in reaching out to the diverse community. For example, such practices as evening or early morning conferences, bilingual communication, childcare during meetings, parent education classes, personal contact with families, and learning activities for families to use at home are effective strategies which enable families to become involved in their children's education. In the case of families who may be recent arrivals to this country, or not yet fluent or literate in English, or unfamiliar with the culture of U.S. public schools, these innovative strategies become doubly important.

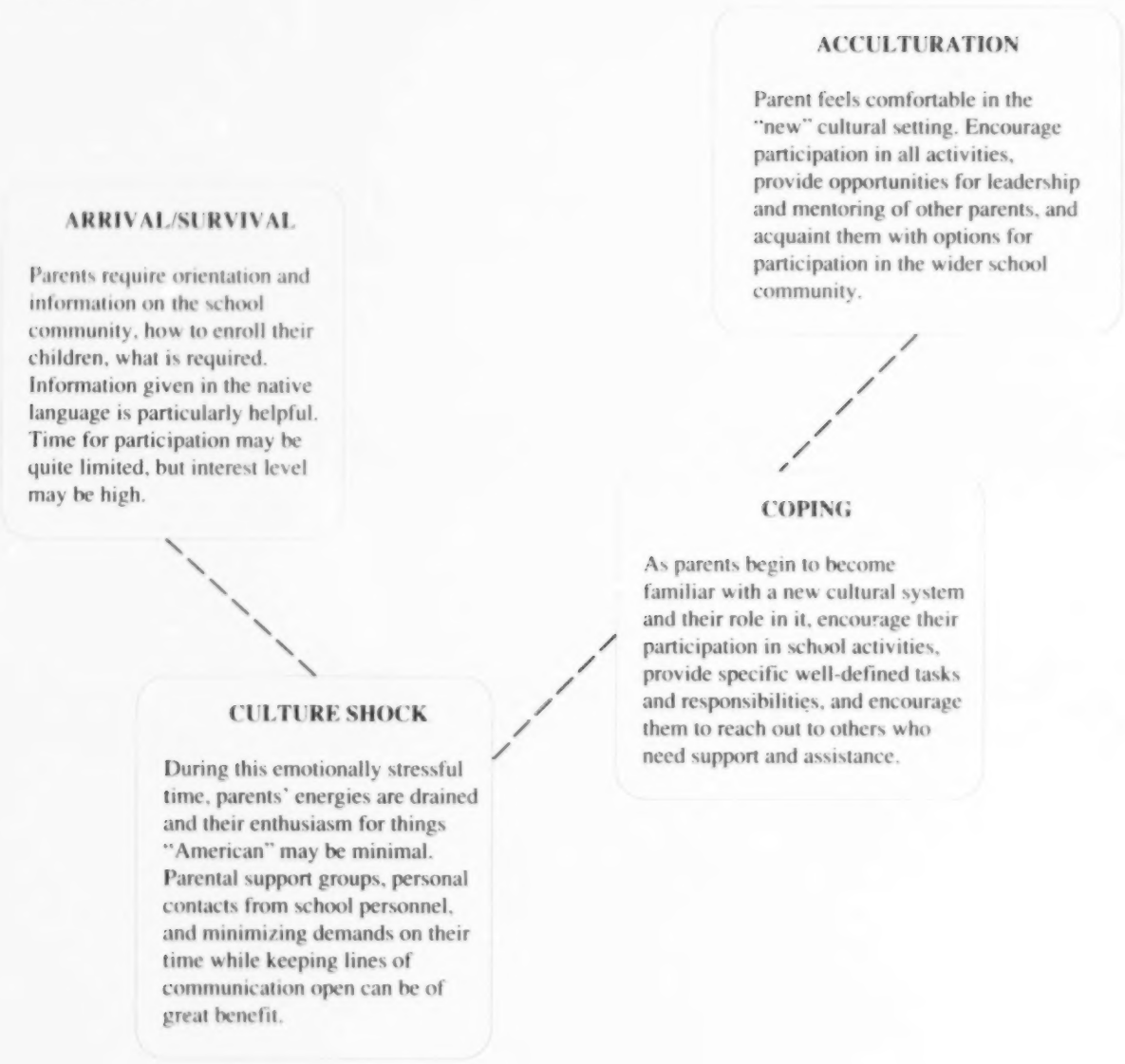
Experience has shown that language minority families (the term which will be used to apply to all three categories of individuals mentioned previously) do care deeply about their children's schooling. What is required is for educators to act as partners in education with these and other families, recognizing the important contributions that all families can make to the schools and to their children's success.

A Framework for Involving Language Minority Families in the Schools

Arlington's approach to fostering home–school cooperation with its language minority families is to recognize and encourage all five types of involvement identified by Epstein. At the same time, the school system recognizes that the vast majority of its language minority families are still in the process of adjusting to the mainstream culture and language of the United States. While more and more of Arlington's non-native English speaking students are born in the United States, nearly all of their families have come here as immigrants or refugees. Thus it has been appropriate to take into consideration the stages of adjustment used to describe the newcomer's experience in coming to terms with the language and culture of the new home country. These stages are described in Figure 1. It has likewise been useful to recognize that these different stages of adjustment may elicit different responses from parents with respect to their willingness and/or availability to be actively involved in their children's education. For example, all newcomers to the school system need basic information about school requirements, routines, schedules, and the like. For language minority newcomers, such information may need to be given in the home language and in a setting where there can be personal, face-to-face exchange and clarification. Similarly, as families become more settled in the community and feel more familiar with how the school system operates, they may be more willing to participate in governance and advocacy activities. It should not be assumed that only parents who are in the final stage of adjustment will take part in school decision making. The purpose of considering the cultural and language adjust-

Figure 1

Stages of Adjustment for Newcomers


ACCULTURATION
Parent feels comfortable in the "new" cultural setting. Encourage participation in all activities, provide opportunities for leadership and mentoring of other parents, and acquaint them with options for participation in the wider school community.
ARRIVAL/SURVIVAL
Parents require orientation and information on the school community, how to enroll their children, what is required. Information given in the native language is particularly helpful. Time for participation may be quite limited, but interest level may be high.
COPING
As parents begin to become familiar with a new cultural system and their role in it, encourage their participation in school activities, provide specific well-defined tasks and responsibilities, and encourage them to reach out to others who need support and assistance.
CULTURE SHOCK
During this emotionally stressful time, parents' energies are drained and their enthusiasm for things "American" may be minimal. Parental support groups, personal contacts from school personnel, and minimizing demands on their time while keeping lines of communication open can be of great benefit.

ment process is to be able to offer a network of support strategies that will enable families to take advantage of the various opportunities to participate.

Implementing a Participation Model

How can a local school system encourage the participation of parents who are newly arrived and/or whose English proficiency is limited? Experience has shown that success is possible because such parents do care about their children's education and want to be involved in their local schools. When a school system provides caring, sensitive, and enlightened avenues for these parents they become active partners in education.

Factors that Affect Parental Involvement

In designing appropriate support systems for parents in general, the experiences and resources of language minority parents should be acknowledged and respected. After all, these factors will have a strong influence on their initial and later involvement. Although every family entering the school system is unique, some generalizations can be helpful. Differences in levels of involvement may be influenced by the factors described below:

1. Length of residence in the United States

Newcomers to this country will most likely need considerable orientation and support in order to understand what their child's school expects in the way of participation and involvement. Native language communication, cultural orientation sessions, and support of others who have been newcomers can be extremely helpful to newly arrived families during what may be a stressful period of adjustment.

2. English language proficiency

Parents whose English proficiency is limited may find it difficult or intimidating to communicate with school staff or to help in school activities without bilingual support from someone in the school or community. These parents can, of course, participate successfully, and can help their child at home, so care must be taken to see that they receive information and that their efforts are welcomed and encouraged.

3. Availability of support groups and bilingual staff

Native language parent groups and bilingual school personnel can make a crucial difference in fostering involvement among parents. Bilingual community liaisons can also translate the information provided to parents. These services not only ensure that information is

understood, they also demonstrate to parents that the school wants to involve them actively in the life of the school and their children's academic development.

4. Prior experiences

Language minority families differ widely in the extent to which they are familiar and comfortable with the concept of parental involvement in schools. Some newcomers may have been actively involved in their children's education in the home country, while others may come from cultures where the parents' role in education is understood in very different terms. Parents whose families have resided in this country for generations may feel unwelcome or uncomfortable in their child's school and may need encouragement and support in their efforts to participate. Others, as indicated in Epstein's study (1986), may need only some specific suggestions on how to "help" in order to participate more actively in education at home and at school.

Family Involvement Model—District-Wide

Successful implementation of programs and strategies to involve language minority families requires both a district-level response and school-based initiatives. Both components of one school district's model are described more fully below. Figure 2 illustrates the district-wide response; Figure 3 details the initiatives of one school within the system.

Intake Center

For newly arrived and/or non-native English speaking families, an Intake Center can be an effective first point of contact with the school system. An Intake Center can provide multilingual assistance in registration, placement, testing, and information services. It can also provide translation and interpretation services for parent/teacher conferences and other school activities.

Throughout the year, Intake Center staff can interpret at individual school orientation meetings. At the beginning of the school year, a district-wide orientation meeting for all parents new to the district can be organized by Intake Center staff; at the end of the year, a special workshop in which parents can be informed about summer school offerings, summer recreational options and summer youth employment opportunities will also be helpful to families. An Intake Center can help to bridge the communication gap between English-speaking school staff and parents who may not yet be fluent in the language.

Figure 2

Model for Involving Language Minority Families

Figure 3

Barrett Elementary School

Bilingual Staff

Bilingual (community resource) assistants can be a valuable link between the schools and language minority families. They can ease both students' and parents' transition into active school involvement. Bilingual staff can help families feel welcome in the school from the start and can encourage their participation in school activities. In Arlington, bilingual assistants develop and implement activities that address the particular needs of each school and serve as links to district-wide information and programs.

Orientation for Parents

When language minority families first enter the school system, they may be in need of basic information in their native language in order to understand school policies and community resources. Because these parents vary in their experiences and skills, ongoing orientation workshops for parents on topics such as homework, school attendance and classroom discipline should be offered. An orientation handbook translated into several languages is also extremely helpful. The handbook should contain information on school and community resources of interest to parents.

Back-to-School Night and Parent/Teacher Conferences

Two important activities that can take place in the schools are Back-to-School Night and Parent/Teacher Conferences. In Arlington County, Back-To-School Night is held yearly in September, and Parent/Teacher Conferences are held twice a year. Both events provide opportunities for parents and teachers to meet and to share important information about the school and/or student progress. Priority is given to providing interpreters at Back-To-School Night and at Parent/Teacher Conferences so that all teachers and parents can benefit from the exchange.

In Arlington County, the Intake Center provides paid interpreters for conferences between parents and teachers. These interpreters contact parents before conferences and help put them at ease by conveying the purpose for the meeting. They arrange to meet parents at the school and escort them to the conference. Because these conferences are so important, care must be taken to schedule them for the convenience of both working and non-working parents. Alternative times for conferences, such as early morning or evenings, should be explored to enable parents to participate. Letting parents know that their participation is important and providing a welcoming, reassuring environment helps create the conditions needed for substantive communication between home and school.

Parent Education Workshops

In addition to orientation sessions for parents and parent/teacher conferencing, parents have shown an interest in attending school-sponsored workshops which help them improve their parenting skills and enable them to work more confidently with their children on school-related tasks. A sample workshop on the topic of reading appears in the Appendix.

Language minority parents may respond more positively to those workshops conducted in their native languages or with native language interpretation provided. The provision of onsite childcare also increases attendance.

Multilingual Family Learning Activities

Multilingual family learning activities for home use provide another avenue for parents to support the school curriculum and help their children learn. Such activities are extensions of the classroom curriculum. In Arlington, staff provide an orientation for parents on the use of the family learning activities, introduce the activities to students in the classroom, then send them home on a regular basis. Parents and students complete response sheets, sometimes including a product based on the activities, and return them to the teacher. In our experience, response from parents has been outstanding, especially when there is a continuous monitoring of completed and returned activities and when participants receive recognition for completing the activities.

Native Language Parent Groups

When there are concentrations of minority languages in a given school or community, native language groups can be an excellent way to bring parents into the schools. The group becomes a vital source of information and a means of establishing a network of friends within the community. Through the group, parents can develop the leadership skills needed for participation in other governance and advocacy activities. Parents need to be involved in making the decisions that affect their children's education.

In Arlington, several language-specific parent associations have been formed in recent years. These parent groups not only reach out to newly-arrived parents but also provide a link to organizations like the Parent–Teacher Association (PTA) and other district-wide organizations.

Citizen Advisory Committees

Another way to enhance parent participation is by establishing a network of citizens' advisory committees which can make recommendations to the school board on a variety of issues. In Arlington County,

those citizens' advisory committees meet monthly. One of these committees advises the board on how to improve services for language minority students and parents; others advise administrative staff on individual curricular subject areas. The school board has made concerted efforts to recruit language minority participation on each of its advisory committees.

District Support for Staff

Fostering home–school cooperation requires that school personnel receive support in their efforts to reach out to families, communicate effectively, and work in partnership with parents. This can be accomplished through—

Staff development on topics such as:

- understanding cultural differences and diverse learning styles;
- planning and conducting effective parent meetings;
- utilizing cultural heritage to support instruction; and
- working with family learning activities.

Staff development should be offered on an ongoing basis to enable staff to identify and employ successful strategies with their students' families.

Development of resource materials on topics such as:

- cultural background of minority language groups represented in the student population;
- working with language minority parents; and
- working effectively with interpreters.

Offering stipends and recertification credits:

- for conducting parent workshops and developing materials after school hours.

Offering opportunities to network with colleagues:

- to share concerns, questions, success stories, and the challenges encountered in the process of working with parents to enhance the academic achievement of students. School districts should seek to provide such opportunities both formally and informally. For example, monthly administrative staff monitoring meetings, which include discussion of issues related to involving language minority parents, can be implemented. A district-wide committee on parent involvement might be established to enable teachers, aides, and resource assistants to come together on a regular basis to share experiences and resources. In Arlington County, a committee was formed to explore avenues for providing leadership opportunities for Spanish-speaking parents.

District-Wide Multicultural Conference

For the past ten years, Arlington Public Schools has sponsored an annual conference to address issues of importance to language minority parents and to celebrate the County's rich cultural heritage. Initially, the Multicultural Conference consisted primarily of informative workshops for parents conducted in several languages. In recent years, it has emphasized the importance of the County's cultural diversity and has sought to involve more staff, students, and families in both the study and celebration of the contributions made by all ethnic groups represented in Arlington. In 1990, more than 800 parents, students, and teachers participated in this festive event, which is seen as a major cooperative effort of the community, families, and the schools.

Developing a Long Range Plan

Ideally, planning should be long range and should precede program implementation; realistically, the reverse is often true. In the Arlington Public Schools, the success experienced in relatively small-scale family involvement initiatives has led to the development of comprehensive, district-wide, long-range plans to involve language minority families. The plan calls for the identification of strategies and mechanisms to address achievement and participation of all minorities, including coordination with other program areas, staff development, and parent and community involvement. The plan has the support of the superintendent and the school board.

District-level initiatives establish the broad framework for outreach to parents and community. How the framework described above is translated into action at the school level with a particular group of parents and teachers varies from school to school. The following is a case study of one elementary school that has made intensive efforts to foster home–school cooperation with its language minority families.

Barrett Elementary School: Empowering Parents

Kate Waller Barrett Elementary School is one of eighteen K–5 elementary schools in Arlington County. Of its 315 pupils, 82 percent are language and racial minority students. Sixty percent of Barrett's pupils are Hispanic. Nearly half (46.7 percent) of the students at Barrett are identified as limited English proficient (LEP); county-wide, 16 percent of all students are designated as LEP.

The Role of the Principal in Parent Involvement

Given Barrett's student population, staff have found it both unrealistic and ineffective to expect the more traditional form of home–school cooperation with "parents-in-the-school" involved as volun-

teers in highly successful fund drives. New expectations focus on a broader meaning of cooperation, requiring that much of the initiative be taken by the school. The principal assumes a new role as a facilitator, seeking to open the school to a variety of groups for multiple purposes. He provides leadership and encouragement to both staff and parents to work together to improve the environment of the school, to establish a sense of community among a diverse group of families, and to support a climate of high academic expectation for all students.

When Barrett's current principal assumed that role in 1982, he made parent involvement a high priority on his personal agenda. His goals included the following:

- hiring staff who are bilingual and who view working with parents as a high priority;
- sending written communications home in two languages and provide interpreters for parents at school events;
- acquainting parents with the resources that are available to ease their transition into their new community; and
- encouraging the integration of language minority families into existing PTA activities and programs.

Working toward these goals has required a willingness on the part of the principal to tolerate possible grievances from applicants who are not bilingual. It has meant dealing with some individuals' initial impatience with bilingual interpretation at meetings where both monolingual English-speaking parents and language minority parents were present. It has necessitated ongoing encouragement of staff and parents when they become discouraged about the extra time and effort it takes to reach out to a diverse community. And, finally, it has required the flexibility to schedule many events during non-school hours, to provide childcare so that families can attend school functions, and to find translators so that no one feels excluded from the life of the school.

School-Based Efforts

Several policies and programs for fostering home–school cooperation make up the model that has been implemented at Barrett. They are illustrated in Figure 3. Each is described briefly below in relation to the five broad categories of parent involvement outlined previously.

1. Helping parents meet their children's basic education needs

The parents at Barrett School are very much concerned about their children's well-being and education. However, because many of them are newcomers to the United States, they sometimes have limited understanding of, or experience with, school expectations and methods of instruction in this country. Sometimes the newcomers follow cul-

tural parenting norms that differ significantly from those that school personnel may expect, and the changes of lifestyles resulting from immigration can produce both confusion and stress. For these reasons, Barrett has initiated activities designed to educate parents about cultural expectations, the school program and curriculum, their new community, and parenting.

Orientation to Barrett School

Three sessions are held each year to introduce all parents to the curriculum and special program options at the school. These orientations are conducted in English and Spanish.

Back-to-School Night is held in September of each year. Parents attend presentations by their children's teachers, which address curricular objectives, behavioral expectations, grading and homework policies, the nature of the student's day, and projects to be expected in the course of the school year.

An Evening for Kindergarten Parents is held in October or November of each year. During the meeting, kindergarten teachers and reading teachers illustrate for parents the developmental steps for children learning to read and write.

An Evening on the Gifted and Talented Program is also held in the fall. Typically, this meeting addresses the school district's criteria and procedures for identifying students as gifted or talented. Parents learn how students are served and see the units used at each grade level.

Parent Education Workshops

The school's bilingual community resource assistant coordinates a series of bi-weekly parent education meetings for newly arrived parents of children in grades K–2. These workshops address topics such as school expectations, child development, effective discipline, and basic concepts taught in school. Childcare is provided at these meetings; often, there are as many children attending as adults.

The last evening in this series includes an awards ceremony where parents are recognized with certificates for their frequency of participation. A potluck supper completes the evening.

Parenting Workshops

The counselor at the school sought and obtained a special grant from a local organization to help parents deal with the stress of immigration and the problems resulting from that stress. The counselor initiated bi-weekly parenting sessions on a variety of topics, including understanding children's feelings, assertive behaviors, and family communication patterns; preventing substance and drug abuse; and understanding developmental differences in childhood.

2. Improving communication between home and school

Bilingual Staff

As mentioned earlier, the principal has made it a priority to hire bilingual staff whenever vacancies occur. (Currently, 13 of Barrett's 41 staff members are bilingual.) The bilingual community resource assistant is a key person because she works with students, teachers, and parents, serving as a vital link between home and school.

Bilingual Materials

Communications from the school are sent home in both English and Spanish. The PTA newsletter is translated as well. Bilingual staff regularly call parents to ensure that information has been received and understood.

3. Bringing parents into the school as participants

Although volunteering at school during the day is not an option for many of Barrett's working parents, a number of activities are held outside of regular school hours that are of interest to the diverse elements of the community. These activities are often sponsored by the school's PTA and include evening meetings, a book fair, an international potluck, the Sock Hop, and the annual Spring Fair.

Typically, evening meetings feature some aspect of student work, such as music performance, art displays, drama performances, a science fair, or a colonial fair. These generally require no more parental effort than that required to attend and enjoy and, in doing so, demonstrate support for what their child is doing.

4. Helping parents support their children's learning in the home

Barrett School has two special projects designed to involve parents in working directly with their children on curricular objectives at home. The first is the Family Learning Project, which involves children and parents in a series of special learning activities. The second is Project Discovery, which focuses on science and mathematics for all families and has two parent support components.

The Family Learning Project

The goals of the ten-week Family Learning Project are to have parents and children learn together, at home, through the use of family learning activities. Such activities increase the likelihood of student success in school. The project begins and ends with a meeting for parents. The first meeting is devoted to orienting parents to the project and includes demonstrations of how the activities are done. In 1990, the activities for upper grade students included the following:

- using the newspaper index
- understanding parts of the newspaper
- using the comics to learn
- buy it!
- making a study schedule
- recording your study time
- what TV is best to watch?
- which TV shows are alike?

At the end of the ten-week project, there is a potluck supper and awards ceremony. Certificates and silver dollars are presented to families who have completed all eight lessons. Families who complete at least five activities receive certificates of accomplishment. Each child's picture is taken with his/her family as part of the ceremony. Approximately $500 to $800 is required to support the Family Learning Project.

Project Discovery

This project, begun in 1990–1991 as a part of a larger district initiative, addresses learning in science and mathematics. One important component of the project is a series of monthly evening workshops taught by The Project Discovery Teacher in the school's science–mathematics laboratory, during which parents learn about science, mathematics, and resources available for each. In addition, there are two "festival" evenings. The first is devoted to patterns, the second to plant and animal life during which the school is converted into a "swamp."

5. Involving parents in governance and advocacy activities

In Virginia, each school is required to have its own parent advisory committee. Barrett's parent advisory committee is charged with reviewing the school's annual plan, and assessing student academic progress, as well as other aspects of the school or district educational program. It typically consists of two representatives from the PTA Executive Committee and four other parents. To encourage language minority participation, the principal contacts parents directly if they do not respond to an invitation in the PTA newsletter.

On other occasions, such as the self-study process for regional accreditation, other committees are needed to effectively examine school programs. At Barrett, the self-study and the design of Project Discovery required substantial parent involvement. The principal directly nominated or appointed representatives from the different language groups to committees or sought nominations from knowledgeable staff members.

The PTA has organized groups of parents to provide input to the

school board when important issues arise. For example, a representative group appeared before the school board to contest consideration of changing the Barrett school boundaries, an action that would have reassigned their children to other schools. Parents addressed the board in both English and Spanish, with interpretation provided.

Evidence of Success

What evidence do we have that these efforts to involve parents are successful? Do we know that parents value them? There are several indirect measures that serve as indicators of success at Barrett:

- Parent representatives to the Advisory Committee attend at least five of the six meetings held annually;
- International Night is typically attended by more than 150 parents and their children;
- Parent Education evenings are regularly attended by 18 to 30 parents;
- Between 30 and 40 parents attend the orientation or awards evenings for the Home Learning Project, and even more families participate in the project's activities;
- Back-to-School Night hosts between 150 and 180 parents each year;
- Attendance at the Kindergarten Evening ranges from 12 to 20 parents;
- The Gifted and Talented Program evening draws from 4 to 15 parents;
- Project Discovery workshops attract from 12 to 30 parents;
- Project Discovery festival evenings draw more than 150 parents and their children.
- Student attendance at school is consistently above 95 percent.
- Parent participation in Parent Teacher Conferences averages more than 80 percent.

On various standardized measures, Barrett students perform on a par with other Virginia students even though the majority of Barrett's students are non-native English speakers. Each fall, Arlington fifth-grade students take the Degrees of Reading Power test in order to identify students who may need additional assistance to meet the literacy level required to graduate from high school. Of Barrett's 29 fifth graders, 11 are native English speakers and 18 are language

minorities. Twelve of the students scored high enough on the Reading Power test to be able to predict their ability to pass the literacy test when it is administered in high school. Seven of the 12 were non-native English speaking students.

Can such results be directly linked to parent involvement? Perhaps not, but what Barrett staff do know for certain is that staff and parents cooperate as partners to ensure student success in school. Communication is two-way; parents feel comfortable and welcome at the school; staff work directly with parents to encourage student learning at home; pupil attendance is consistently high; and parent participation at the school and county level is evident. Research studies conducted in other locales strongly suggest that such collaboration yields positive gains in student achievement.

Conclusion

Fostering home–school cooperation in today's world requires time, effort, and an investment of both human and financial resources. It calls for a re-examination of the assumptions that have traditionally defined parent involvement in the school. If cooperation is to be realized, there must be a commitment to opening opportunities for participation to all families, regardless of the parents' language background, level of education, or familiarity with school procedures and policies. School staff need administrative support, time, and access to resources if they are to work cooperatively with their students' families. The end result, of course, is that students benefit, and all who are involved reap profound rewards.

The activities suggested above are only a few that have been tried and found to be successful. There are more activities that might be initiated that can develop closer home–school relationships.

References

Bennett, W. J. (1986). *First lessons: A report on elementary education in America*. Washington, DC: Department of Education.

Comer, J. P. (1984, May). Home–school relationships as they affect the academic success of children. *Education and Urban Society*, *16*(3), 323–337.

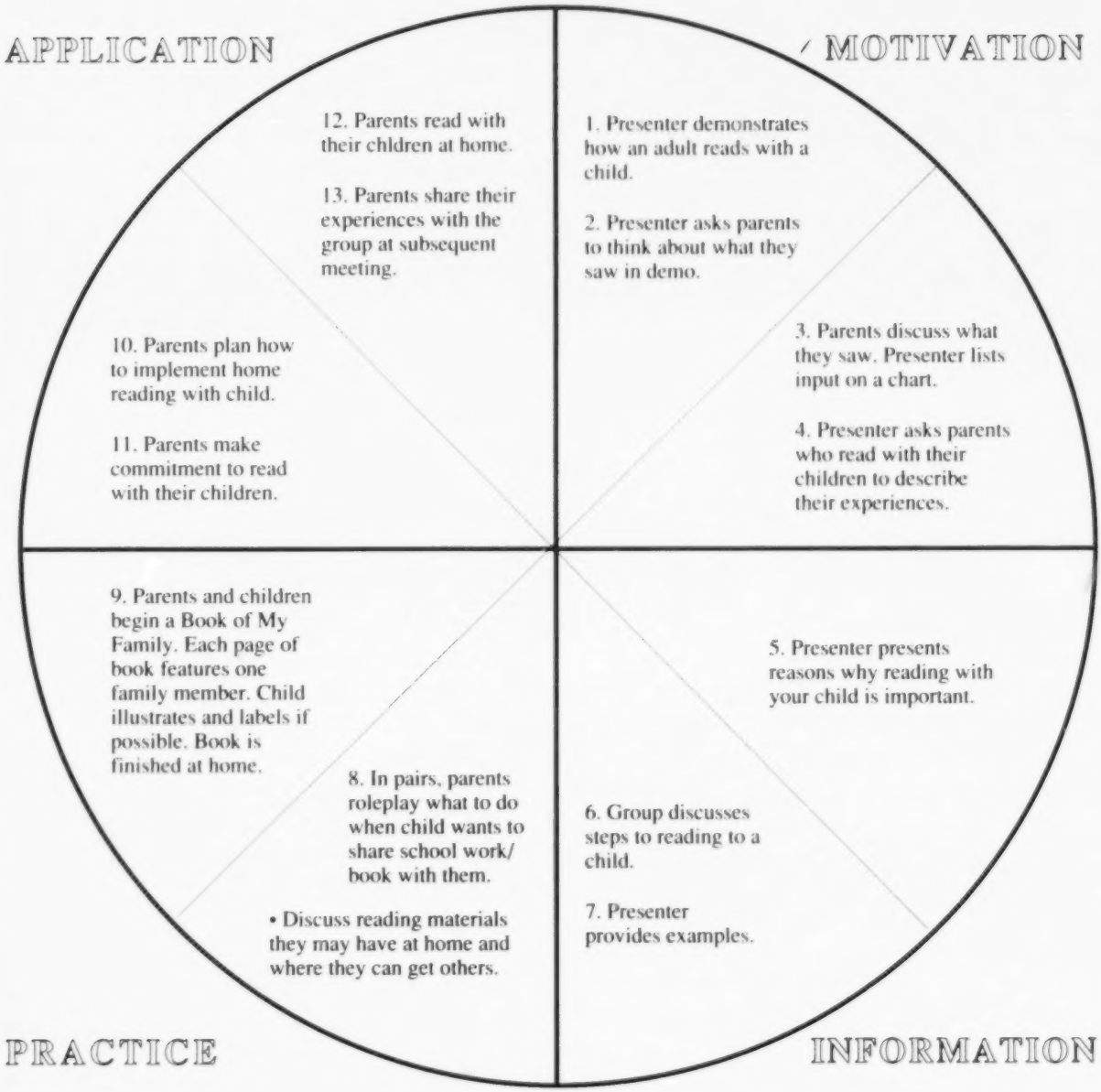
Epstein, J. L. (1986, June). Parent involvement: Implications for limited-English-proficient parents. In C. Simich-Dudgeon (Ed.), *Issues of parent involvement*. Proceedings of symposium held at Trinity College, Washington, DC.

Rich, D., Van Dien, J., & Mallox, B. (1979). Families as educators of their own children. In R. Brandt (Ed.), *Partners: Parents and schools*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Simich-Dudgeon, C. (1986). *Parent involvement and the education of limited-English-proficient students*. ERIC Digest. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.

Vobejda, B. (1991, March 11). Asian, Hispanic numbers in U.S. soared in 1980s, census reveals. *The Washington Post*, pp. 1, 14.

Parent Workshop
Reading: A Shared Experience


APPLICATION
MOTIVATION
12. Parents read with their children at home.
13. Parents share their experiences with the group at subsequent meeting.
1. Presenter demonstrates how an adult reads with a child.
2. Presenter asks parents to think about what they saw in demo.
10. Parents plan how to implement home reading with child.
11. Parents make commitment to read with their children.
3. Parents discuss what they saw. Presenter lists input on a chart.
4. Presenter asks parents who read with their children to describe their experiences.
9. Parents and children begin a Book of My Family. Each page of book features one family member. Child illustrates and labels if possible. Book is finished at home.
8. In pairs, parents roleplay what to do when child wants to share school work/ book with them.
• Discuss reading materials they may have at home and where they can get others.
5. Presenter presents reasons why reading with your child is important.
6. Group discusses steps to reading to a child.
7. Presenter provides examples.
PRACTICE
INFORMATION

FOCUS:
To help parents understand why it's important to read with their children.
To help parents identify what to read with their children.
To help parents understand how to read with their children.

Etta Johnson, ESOL/HILT
Arlington Public Schools, 1988

About the Authors

Emma Violand-Sánchez is Curriculum Supervisor for ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) and HILT (High Intensity Language Training) programs; she also directs a federally-funded Family-School Partnership Project for Arlington Public Schools. A nationally known Hispanic community leader and educator, Dr. Violand has served as a frequent consultant to school districts around the country and abroad. Her 1988 doctoral dissertation on learning and cognitive styles won national recognition from the National Association for Bilingual Education.

Christine P. Sutton is an ESOL/HILT elementary teacher for Arlington Public Schools and serves as the Project Specialist of the district's Family-School Partnership Project. As an educator she has also worked as a Training Specialist for the Georgetown University Title VII Multifunctional Resource Center, been a consultant to several school districts in the area of instruction and program design, and made presentations at the national conferences of both TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) and NAVAE (National Association of Vietnamese American Educators).

Herbert W. Ware has been principal of Kate Waller Barrett Elementary School in Arlington, Virginia, since 1982. He has held a variety of other administrative positions in the district including those of Deputy Associate Superintendent for Instruction, Supervisor of Mathematics, and Director of Testing. In 1990, Dr. Ware gave a joint presentation with Dr. Violand at the annual convention of the National Association of Elementary School Principals; their presentation was entitled, "The Challenge: Quality Instruction and Parental Involvement for a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Student Population."

ED338LANG13

© U.S. Government Printing Office : 1991 - 300-303/50073